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Gourd Culture



Two Silver Medals were awarded our Gourds by the Massachusetts Horticultural Society at Boston on August 17, 1935 and September 14, 1935. Our Gourds have also won prizes at Chicago, Brooklyn and New York City.



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Gourds, those amusing and interesting "garden gnomes," can be had in all shapes, sizes, and colors. The tiny highly-covered sorts are ideal for Holiday wreaths and swags of evergreen. Table centerpieces of candles, gourds, greens and berries are very effective. Larger sizes, heaped in pewter or wooden bowls, are most decorative. The hard-shelled kinds when well matured make fine bird houses, dippers, bowls, or flower vases.

The ornamental gourds, *Cucurbita*, native of the warmer parts of the earth, have yellow flowers and are day blooming. They are not as rampant growers as the hard-shelled sorts and can be planted much closer. About three to four months will mature the ornamental gourd from seed, while a month to six weeks longer is required for the hard-shelled kinds. Here in Massachusetts we rarely can mature the latter kinds unless we start the seed a month ahead of time in a sunny window or greenhouse. The tiny plants are potted when in the seed leaf stage and carefully transferred out of doors after all danger of frost is past.

A fine place to plant gourd seed is at the base of a fence or trellis with a southern exposure sheltered from harsh winds. In such a location they can be planted in hills about three feet apart and allowed to climb. In this way the maturing fruits are kept off the ground, thereby having even color on all sides, which is a distinct advantage for decorative purposes. While the usual advice is to plant in hills six to ten feet apart, the small garden owner will find that very good results may be obtained by planting much closer, providing the ground is well fer-

tilized and that moisture is supplied as needed. I have known fine crops to be harvested when planted as close as four by four feet and thinned to two husky plants per hill.

Plant the seed not over an inch deep in moist soil. We find that a double handful of hen manure well mixed in the hill gives the little plants a good start. A light, well-drained neutral soil well supplied with organic matter is preferred for this crop. It is a good idea to broadcast a commercial fertilizer analyzing about 5-8-7 at the rate of one ton per acre, which should be raked or harrowed in after spading or plowing before the hills are marked out and prepared.

Keep weeds down by hoeing and cultivating. Remember a soil mulch conserves moisture. This one operation may mean the difference between success and failure to mature the crop. Squash bugs and cucumber beetles must be fought while the plants are small. Hand pick the bugs and dust with hydrated lime after each shower to keep down the beetles.

About the time the vines begin to run, which usually occurs around six to eight weeks after planting, we find that it pays well to hoe in around the hills a fertilizer low in nitrogen but high in minerals, such as a 2-8-6 or thereabout, to promote early maturity. It is a mistake to use a high nitrogen manure at this time as this promotes vegetative growth and delays the ripening of the crop.

Do not pick ornamental gourds until they are absolutely hard. It is well to test with the finger nail. The full color develops only after the gourd is well matured. A gourd will not keep if picked green or if roughly handled. Always cut gourds

from the vine, being careful to harvest with part of the stem left on the fruit. We dip all the gourds in a sulpho-naphthol solution and dry in the sun. Store in an airy place. Coat with liquid wax, white shellac, or varnish when dry. The wax gives a fine dull lustre and is preferred by many. Wax gives better protection than shellac and varnish. Shellac is inexpensive and quite satisfactory. We prefer a good coating of a medium-quality varnish. It dries much slower than shellac but affords good protection and heightens the natural color of the gourd.

The hard-shelled gourds, *Lagenaria*, native of tropical Africa and Asia, require a long time to mature. The vines sometimes run thirty to forty feet and should not be planted closer than eight feet apart. To this species belong the interesting Hercules Club, Dipper, Bottle, Powder Horn Serpent, and others. The flowers are a white night-blooming kind fertilized by moths. They are well worth attempting to grow if one has the space and can start early. In Massachusetts we keep trying, with success about half the time. We leave these fruits on the vine until frost and then harvest with care. We hang them in a warm airy place after washing and drying. It takes all winter to dry them until the seeds rattle when shaken. Do not attempt to cut or work these gourds until thoroughly dried.

We raise and sell gourds and gourd seed, and will do our best to answer all inquiries about them.

Our seed specialties have won many awards including first and special prizes. This season they have been awarded four Silver Medals in the Boston and New York shows. You will make no mistake in planting our seed.